



**OLD-TIMERS**—Twenty-mule team being driven by Russell Spainhower on dry bed of Panamint Valley on

trek from Owens Valley to Death Valley for Centennial celebration. Outline of Argus Mountains in background.

## Original Borax Wagons Repeat Wasteland Trek in 49er Anniversary

BY KAY FRASHER

**EMIGRANT STATION**, en route to Death Valley, Nov. 29— Pulling original borax wagons used by the Pacific Coast Borax Co. in the late '70s, the 20-mule team trained for several months in Lone Pine by Mule Skinner Russell Spainhower and his five swampers left Lone Pine the day before Thanksgiving.

Russ Spainhower rode the left hand mule at the rear of the line, one of the two "wheelers," starting the mules by word command, driving with a single "jerk line" leading to the left front leader. The slow and picturesque trip through canyons and desert wastelands, sponsored by the Pacific Coast Borax Co., supervised by Bruce Morgan, owner of the mules, and Death Valley Stables, will take eight days, climaxed by the 49er pageant to be held in Desolation Canyon at 2 p.m. Dec. 3, commemorating the centennial year of the original Death Valley party.

### Two Miles an Hour

The half-mile-long procession of 20 mules, two borax wagons, water tank wagon, covered wagon, stage coach, two-seated buck board, freight wagon and farm surrey trudged along at two miles an hour. Lending 49er atmosphere to the trek are many descendants of the 49ers themselves.

Tom Jefferson, a native Piute Mono Indian, at night strums the guitar and sings and by day drives the mules. Driving the two-seated buckboard is Eddie Cline. Eddie's brother Welford, the famous bronco buster and owner of the second toughest string of rodeo horses in the United States, drives the stage coach. The Clines are members of the famous Cline family who pioneered Lone Pine. Pete Garner, another native, heads the mules on a white pinto and Bill Carrasco, Spanish-Irish nephew of Henderson D. Hill, the last driver of the stage and freight coach between Johannesburg and Ballarat, drives the farm surrey upon which I rode. Bill Carrasco's uncle, Harold Gill, is one of the swampers who helped break the mules.

### Son of Pioneer

Driver of the covered wagon is Fred Reynolds, son of Annie Bastian, 74, who was the first white child born in Panamint.

The oldest person of the party is pioneer Frank Kardel, 76; the youngest is Charolette Ann Olivas, 10-month-old daughter of swamper Henry Olivas and niece of Brakeman Pete Olivas, descendants of early Spanish settlers. The five Morgan children driving the loose stock; Bronco Buster Fred Moore and Mrs. Tex Cushing of Mammoth Lakes and the famous dog team are among the many more interesting people re-enacting a chapter of California history. We made camp the first night at Stone Corral, four miles south

of Keeler, an abandoned historical stage and freight depot.

After a day of travel we reached Panamint Springs at the mouth of Darwin Wash on the west side of spectacular Panamint Valley, a land of purple romance.

Early Saturday morning the trek was again on its way, traversing Panamint Lake Bed over the floor of Panamint Valley and into narrow Wildrose Canyon, up the steep grade to Wildrose Station. Here the original foundation and parts of the adobe walls of the first stage station may be seen at the side of the canyon wall.

### Still Can Join

Sunday morning, while the mules were being reshod and rested from their long pull the party made a side trip in the wagons up Wildrose Canyon to the charcoal kilns and mahogany flats on the side of Telescope Peak. From here, to the east, we obtained an unobstructed view of Death Valley and Bad Water, lowest point in the United States and to the west the Sierra Nevada Range in its snow-clad glory, with Mt. Whitney, highest point in the United States. Being so close to where emigrants perished in 1849 for lack of water, the snow-covered ground and pinon trees gave up a sharp change of scene from the vast desert with rainbow hues, deep shadows and bizarre formations.

Monday morning, after a breakfast of ham and eggs with fruit pancakes and hot coffee

and served off the chuck wagon by Johnny Morris and his three small sons as junior cooks, another lap of the journey began with Aguerberry Point to be reached for night encampment. Tonight, under clear skies and bright moon, the mules rested at Emigrant Station before starting down the long gradual grade into Death Valley, past Stove Pipe Wells Hotel to the famous ever-shifting sand dunes.

You can still join the last lap of the trek either Wednesday or Thursday at the Sand Dunes Camp-site. Just ask for Bruce Morgan and join the real western group; be with them in the overnight encampment Friday night near Desolation Canyon, and witness the Death Valley Centennial Celebration in the magnificent natural amphitheatre, at 2 p.m. Saturday.